



The Corporation of the Town of Milton

Report To:	Council
From:	Andy Scott, Director, Strategic Initiatives and Business Development
Date:	August 23, 2021
Report No:	ES-006-21
Subject:	Digital Service Squad Funding

Recommendation: THAT Town of Milton Council approve the Digital Service Squad Grant funding and funding agreement as outlined in this report.

AND THAT the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to execute any associated agreements.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Town of Milton, in collaboration with the Downtown BIA have applied for a second round of Digital Main Street Ontario funding in the amount of \$25,000. This builds upon the \$18,000 previously received in 2020.

- The Town has received confirmation the funding is approved, subject to Council approval to execute a funding agreement.
- The funding will be utilized to hire Digital Main Street Service Squad staff, providing direct support to small businesses across Milton to implement e-commerce and digital marketing solutions. Eligibility criteria has been expanded for 2021, and will include small businesses outside of Downtown Main Street, including the Campbellville commercial area.
- The program is intended to be administered by the Economic Development Division within the Town, supported by the DBIA and Milton Chamber of Commerce.
- The Town has proposed an additional \$6,000 commitment to supplement this program. This funding would be provided from the existing Economic Development Budget and would not require additional capital or operating funding.
- As part of Milton's Economic Recovery Action Plan, this program would support continued business recovery efforts, and align with the general strategies identified within the Council Staff Work plan.



REPORT

Background

In May 2020 the Town of Milton launched the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Task Force and developed the Economic Recovery Action Plan, which focused on addressing local economic recovery from the impacts of the pandemic. Through the task forces guidance the Town partnered with the Downtown Business Improvement Association (BIA) to apply for, and secure \$18,000 in grant funding through the Digital Main Street Ontario program. This program supports the provision of cost free specialized services to small businesses, supporting them in the implementation and enhancement of e-commerce and digital marketing solutions.

This original round of funding and service provision targeted our downtown small business community, meeting a need identified through our COVID-19 Economic Recovery surveys. It was identified that 75% of our small businesses were looking for support in transitioning to e-commerce and digital marketing.

Town staff recently partnered with the BIA to apply for further grant funding to continue to the provision of this specialized support services. The Town has received confirmation that our application for \$25,000 in funding has been successful, subject to Council's approval to execute the necessary funding agreement.

If approved, this program will be offered to our small business community from September 2021 to February 2022 and will attempt to provide service to 100 small businesses across the town.

Discussion

Supporting local businesses and attracting investment is a core function of Milton's Economic Development Division. This is further emphasized as a Town priority through the Council Staff Work plan which supports a strategic approach to growth, development and service provision.

The Town of Milton is continuing to prioritize our community's economic recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff have focused their efforts on delivering programs, which align with the achievement of the Council Staff Work plan and support recovery.

In 2020, the Town completed two economic recovery surveys in partnership with Halton Region, which were designed to provide insight into how businesses across various

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industry sectors have responded to impacts of the pandemic. The survey helped to identify a significant need across small businesses in the community to expand their operations into e-commerce and take advantage of digital marketing opportunities (75% of small business respondents suggested they would welcome support in this regard).

As a response to the needs of the business community, Economic Development collaborated with the DBIA in late 2020 to successfully secure an \$18,000 grant from Digital Main Street Ontario to support skill building and the capacity for small businesses to improve their e-commerce and digital marketing activities. This program was administered through the DBIA and focused on targeting 72 eligible small businesses that were located on Milton's Main Street and members of the DBIA.

Recently the Town of Milton (supported by the DBIA) applied for further funding from Digital Main Street Ontario, but with the ability to offer an expanded program. This expansion would see the eligibility for service expanded beyond Milton's core Main Street locale and would now include members of the Chamber of Commerce, small businesses associated with the MEV Innovation Centre, and eligible small business across the community including the rural downtown of the Campbellville commercial area.

The program would target the provision of service to 100 eligible small businesses across Milton with the aim to:

- Engage and support small businesses in making submissions to the Digital Transformation Grant 2.0 program
- Encourage businesses to undertake digital assessments and better understand their strengths and weaknesses
- Connect businesses with opportunities to gain knowledge and expand their skills in digital marketing
- Provide businesses with direct practice support and guidance to further their digital transformation

If approved the program would run from September 2021 to February 2022.

Intended rollout

It is intended that the Town administer the program through our Economic Development Division in collaboration with the Downtown BIA and the Chamber of Commerce, who will support marketing the services to eligible small businesses.



Discussion

The grant funding requires the recruitment of a full time employee (40 hours per week) OR two part time employees (20 hours per week) to work directly with eligible small businesses. Recruitment is intended to begin immediately and town staff are working with our local educational partners to ensure any job posting is advertised through their alumni programs as well as our typical job posting methods.

In the first 6 to 8 weeks the 'Digital Service Squad' member(s) would focus on promoting and supporting businesses to apply for Digital Transformation Grants as well as working with small businesses to develop digital transformation plans. Each Digital Transformation Grant provides a small business with a customized digital assessment, online training and \$2500 to implement a digital transformation plan. For the remainder of the contract, Digital Service Squad members would dedicate their time to skill and capacity building across our small business sector utilizing the Digital Main Street curriculum.

Reporting

The grant is provided subject to performance reporting requirements and its intended that this reporting also be made available to Council through the Economic Development Divisions annual report update.

Financial Impact

It's important to highlight that the temporary hire(s) outlined within this report would not increase the Towns FTE composition. The hires would be temporary in nature and would be paid for through the grant funding if approved.

The Town has proposed supporting this program through the provision of up to \$6,000 of Town funding which would be allocated from the existing Economic Development budget. This funding would be used to support the project management of the program as well as covering any administrative costs. The Town would also provide in-kind support through oversight of the recruitment process, provision of office space if necessary, as well as the sharing of information and expertise by the Economic Development staff as necessary.



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Respectfully submitted,

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For questions, please contact: Andy Scott

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Attachments
None

CAO Approval
Andrew M. Siltala
Chief Administrative Officer